

Lake County News-Sun, January 20, 2009

After missing President-elect Barack Obama's rally in Chicago's Grant Park on election night, Evie Hakeem of Waukegan decided she would not miss Obama's next big historic event.

She's one of several hundred Lake County residents who will be among the 2 million people expected to attend President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration in Washington, D.C., today.

"I think it's going to be really exciting, being together on the Mall, squished in between all the other 2 million people," she said. "I don't think we'll be cold. There will be too many bodies out there."

Hakeem coordinated a bus trip to see the Presidential Inauguration for about 50 other Lake County residents.

By traveling by bus and staying in a hotel in Pennsylvania, she was able to keep the cost of the three-day trip under \$300 per person, not including the price of attending an optional \$100 ball in Maryland Monday night.

"We wanted to make sure that everyone that wanted to go to Washington could afford to go," Hakeem said.

The trip, sponsored by state Rep. Eddie Washington, D-Waukegan, left Monday around 2 a.m. with a cross-section of people from around the county.

Without tickets, they'll be among the throngs braving the cold for a glimpse of the president during the swearing-in ceremony at the Capitol and the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue.

The politically-connected were able to get the coveted tickets to the areas closest to the Capitol from congressmen or senators who were each allotted a few hundred tickets to pass out.

Pastor John Caples of Jesus Name Apostolic Church in Waukegan will be sitting about as close as you can get, outside of being an elected official or foreign dignitary, in the ticketed area reserved for spouses of members of Congress. Caples got the ticket through U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, whose wife was unable to attend the ceremony.

"There's a buzz about the city," said Caples, who arrived in the D.C. area with his wife and two daughters on Sunday night. "There are people coming from everywhere."

He likens Obama's message of hope for the country to a coach bringing out the best in his players.

"I think Obama will pull the best out of this nation," he said. "It's not that we're putting everything on one man, but if that one man can mobilize the nation, then the greatest of us will show through."

Despite their opposing political views, Republican Greg Koeppen of Grayslake and Democrat Mark Higgins of Grayslake are in Washington together for the inauguration. The airline that carried them to Washington lost their luggage on Saturday.

"The airport was hopping," he said. "There were several large school groups from all over."